

PRODUCT CLOSE-UP

Tama Super X-Tras 50 Drum Kit

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

Hoshino USA, distributors for Tama Drums, are celebrating their 10th Anniversary. A new catalog is out, and they've added the *X-Tras* line. Being deeper than standard sizes, Tama claims 30% greater interior volume.

The *X-Tras* are part of the Tama *Superstar* series, and have 6-ply birch shells made in Japan. The shells have angled seams for greater strength, and are molded in a heat-compression process.

Components of the *X-Tras 50* kit are: 16x22 bass drum, 11x12, 12x13 toms, 16x16 floor tom, 6 1/2x14 metal snare drum, and *Titan* hardware. The complete outfit retails at \$1858.00.

BASS DRUM

The 16x22 bass drum has 20 lugs with T-handle rods. Tama has thoughtfully included two key rods to replace the bottom two T-rods, so pedal mounting is easier and not upset by a T-handle turned the wrong way. I wish more companies would start doing this! A felt strip is included for head dampening. The hoops are 6-ply birch and match the drum's finish. A single venthole with logo badge is located near the front of the shell. Spurs are of the disappearing type, secured in their brackets by a T-screw. The spurs are set at a 45° side angle and a 20° forward angle. They have convertible tips, from rubber to steel spike. However, on a wooden floor, the drum did slide just a bit under heavy playing.

If you leave your front head off, consider Tama's shell-supporter post which is available separately. The post fits inside the shell to give it more strength, thus keeping it from ovaling out.

The drum is fitted with C.S. clear heads on overring, and the drum's sound was tone and depth, and more than enough volume, with a hard attack sound. I had to use an external muffler on the batter side in conjunction with the felt strip to cut down on overring, and the drum's sound was more contained. I imagine it would be great with a *Pinstripe*.

MOUNTING SYSTEM

Tama's *Omni-Sphere* tom-tom holder is standard on all kits. A large diamond-shaped base block is installed near the front of the bass drum shell. This block accepts a 1", single-post down tube with a memory ring. A T-screw pressing an internal-spring steel strip secures the

down-tube height. Atop the tube is a large, satin-finished, V-shaped casting, which holds the ball-and-cage system. T-screws conveniently placed on the tops of the cages are used to adjust angle by loosening the ball inside. The L-arms are not adjustable back and forth inside the ball, and this really doesn't matter because the *Omni-Sphere* affords practically any desirable position or angle. The tom-toms are fitted with column brackets, having an eye-bolt inside, locked with a T-screw. Nothing protrudes the shell. Tama has included *Key-Locks* on the L-arms—their version of a memory ring. Here, the rings have a protruding collar which fits tight against the tom-tom bracket, and arrests all twisting and turning. The *Omni-Sphere* holder does not shake about like many L-arm type holders do. It's very sturdy and simple to operate.

TOM-TOMS

The 11 x 12 and 12 x 13 toms have 12 lugs each. The 16x16 floor tom is a standard *Superstar* drum with 16 lugs, and three legs secured directly by T-screws. None of the drums have internal mufflers. Tama's *Quick-Release* externals are optional at \$13 each though none were included here. All the toms are double-headed with triple-flanged hoops, and are fitted with C.S. clear heads top and bottom. The C.S. heads gave somewhat of a "whap," but the toms still had good definition and tone. For rock playing, they do need dampening, especially if miking.

The sound was tighter with Evans *Hydraulics*, but still loud and extra-clear with no need for dampening at all. Each drum had a definite pitch. Throughout testing, the floor tom really amazed me with its extremely powerful sound. Tuning intervals between drums were sufficient, but I can't help feeling that a 13 x 14 tom would have been more sensible than the 12x 13. In any event, the extra depth on the 12" and 13" naturally gave quite a deep sound. Very impressive.

SNARE DRUM

Tama includes a 6 1/2x14 seamless metal-shell snare with this kit. The drum has ten double-ended lugs, extending almost the full depth of the shell. The lug nuts are held with a nylon retainer instead of the usual spring. Detuning from hard rim shots is practically nil as the retainers have a thread-lock built in. Both hoops are diecast, with the snare-side hoop having a large, extended gate. An internal muffler is



fitted. Tama's knob-operated *One-touch* muffler can be preset for the degree of dampening desired, and lock on or off for quick changes.

The strainer is of the cross-stick type with a fine-tune knob on the throw-off side. A fat, two-piece block serves as the assembly, with a roller bed on both the throw-off and butt sides. The snare unit is 18-strand, held not with string, but with strips of glass tape which is less prone to stretching or breaking.

The drum required some adjusting because of excessive snare rattle. I found it to have a typical, dry, metal sound with a tiny timbale-like ring (fitted with an *Ambassador Coated* batter), and perhaps even a little thin-sounding for its 6 1/2 inches. I would think that a wooden-shell snare (8 inch?) would be the better mate for the *X-Tras*.

HARDWARE

The *Titan* hi-hat stand has a double-braced tripod base with large rubber feet, and a slightly curved split footboard. Linkage is accomplished by a short chain which connects with a double pull rod. Action relies on a compression spring. Since the adjustment is at the top of the external cylinder housing, tension is very easily adjustable from the playing position. There is a knurled knob sprung spur point at the base, and a *Key-Lock* for the height tier. Bottom cymbal angle can be locked in, thanks to a counterlock washer on the tilt cup. The action was good, noise-free and responsive, though a bit too springy for my personal taste. Also the top rod would be too short for some players. An optional extender could be helpful.

Two cymbal stands are included with the *X-Tras 50* kit. These too, have double-braced tripods with fat feet. Each stand has two adjustable tiers with set-in nylon bushings, and are extendable to six feet. The tilter is a sprung modified ratchet, offset to fold down neatly against the top tube. On top is a special one-piece nylon-sleeve nut which screws down on the tilter stem. This replaces the traditional rubber

sleeve and wing nut, and assures that an unknowledgeable player cannot tighten his cymbal down all the way, which can cause cracking. There are no *Key-Locks* fitted. They're not needed anyway, as the stands are very sturdy, sensibly designed, and will not sink or twist.

Tama's *Titan* snare stand also has the double-braced tripod and a nylon bushing at its height joint. Drum angle is achieved by a brake drum tilter with a conical inner piece. It holds the drum using the common basket design with a threaded post and carriage ring. The stand may not go low enough to hold today's 8" snare drums, but nevertheless, like all *Titan* hardware, is sturdy and efficient.

The *King Beat* pedal has the same footboard as the hi-hat: slightly curved with a split heel, and a built-in toe stop. It features a large, square single post which encloses a compression spring. Tension is adjustable via a large slotted cap at the bottom of the post. The pedal must be removed from the drum hoop to operate this cap. Three "memory-marks" are notched into the side of the post for use as adjustment reference. The *King Beat* has a unique heel plate: Beneath the plate is a screw-adjusting, hard rubber circular pad. When the pad disc is rotated, the heel plate can be elevated, changing the footboard angle.

Beater angle is adjustable via a ratchet cam. Beater height is set with a wing screw and eye bolt. Linkage is a 5/8" metal strap. The pedal clamps to the hoop using a plate and cam lifter. After presetting the plate to fit your hoop thickness (via a drum key), the clamp is activated by a lever at the bottom left of the frame. After the initial setting, the lever is all that's needed to lock on or remove the pedal. The pedal's base also has a pair of spring-adjust spur points.

The *King Beat* had decidedly better action from the last time I saw it (*MD Oct/Nov 1980*). I could definitely get used to this pedal. Action is strong but not sloppy, however, I still feel the whole unit is too large.

FINISHES

The *X-Tras* series drums are offered in two high-gloss finishes: Super Mahogany and Cherry Wine. Both are genuine wood veneers. The kit reviewed was finished in Mahogany. Tama has truly done some extraordinary work here. Each drum was perfect, with a *masterful* appearance. Tama's finishing is one of the best I've seen, though I do wish they'd add more finishes.

Tama drums have a five-year guarantee against defects in materials or workmanship. The *X-Tras* are well constructed, and would be ideal for rock. Deeper shell does mean deeper sound, and the *X-Tras* punch out with good volume. The sound is impressive, and the hardware has become somewhat of an industry standard.



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